The Governor's House 149 Kearny Avenue Perth Amboy, Middlesex County, New Jersey

HABS No 12-PERAM

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
District of New Jersey

Historic American Buildings Survey Seymour Williams, A.I.A., District Officer 133 Central Avenue, Rahway, New Jersey

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The Governor's House 149 Kearny Avenue Perth Amboy, Middlesex County, New Jersey

Owner: Mrs. John S. Hanson

Date of Erection: 1764

Architect:

Builder:

Present Condition: Very good

Number of Stories: Four

Materials of Construction: Foundation - cut stone

Exterior walls - mostly Flemish bond, an occasional mixture of English and Flemish; stone belt course on first and second floors front, windowsill high; cut stone window head with keystone; copings on end of gables.

Interior walls - plaster

Inside brick chimneys

Roof - gambrel, slate

Historical Data:

This house was erected by the Lord Proprietors for His Excellency William Franklin, Captain General and Governor-in-Chief of the Province of New Jersey.

In 1763 Governor Franklin arrived at Perth Amboy. He hired one of the best houses in town and lived there some time. However, Perth Amboy was too far from Philadelphia to suit him and he decided to move to Burlington where he resided permanently until 1774 when he came back to Amboy to live in the house erected by proprietors.

Before Franklin returned to Amboy, the house was occupied by Chief Justice Smyth. We are told that during the first residence of Franklin in Perth Amboy, the gentry were anything but cordial. This was probably due to his birth. When he returned, however, he was greeted with open arms. This was because Franklin was a Tory and this Tory city felt more secure.

In 1775 after Benjamin Franklin had returned from abroad he came to Perth Amboy to persuade his son to give up the royal cause. His son refused deciding to rise or fall by the British government in America. Benjamin Franklin grieved much over the fact that he failed to convince his son and wrote a letter to a friend later on in which he said "I am deserted by my only son."

Governor Franklin in the early days of the struggle of the Colonies against England was placed under arrest. He gave his parole and for months occupied the palace at Perth Amboy nominally exercising his duties. He was seized when he issued a proclamation convening the assembly. After his seizure Mrs. Franklin packed up the possessions of the house and later most all of these items were shipped to New York. After the departure of the Franklins, the palace became the headquarters for any British general in the vicinity.

Shortly after the war, the interior was partially destroyed by fire. The house was sold to John Rattoone who restored and enlarged it. Early in the ninteenth century it was purchased by a syndicate which added a wing to the south side and established a hotel under the name of the Brighton House. Later on the house came into the possession of Matthias Bruen and then was inherited by Dr. Alexander M. Bruen who gave it to the Board of Relief of the Presbyterian Church in 1883. For fifty years, according to the arrangement made, it was to be used as a home for disabled Presbyterian clergymen and their families and after that it could be disposed of by the board. This has since been done. The property was sold to John P. Holm, Danish vice-consul. The present owner obtained it from him.

An interesting fact in connection with this house is that at one time Joseph Bonaparte had it under consideration. However, Bonaparte could not obtain the house and lands of the Paterson family then owned by Andrew Bell which shut off his view of the river, and he left Perth Amboy in anger. Later he settled in Bordentown.

Bibliography:

Mills, W.J. <u>Historic Houses in New</u> Jersey Philadelphia, Lippincott and Company, 1902

Delatush, George A. Survey Historian

Supervising Historian

Approved:

LEGIMONN WILLIAMS, A. I.A.

District Officer

ADDENDUM

In Volume III of the Precedings of the New Jersey Historical Society, there is reprinted a paper by William Whitehead which was read before the society on September 27, 1848. It is a biographical sketch of William Franklin which is interesting in connection with this house.

Franklin was born in Pennsylvania in 1731. He served in the Pennsylvania forces before he was of age and obtained the rank of Captain. From 1754 to 1756 he was comptroller of the general post office then under the management of Dr. Franklin; he was also a clerk in the provincial assembly in 1755. When Dr. Franklin sent troops to build forts on the Pennsylvania frontier, William accompanied them.

In July, 1757 he sailed with his father who was appointed colonial agent in London, and there he studied law in the Middle Temple and was called to the bar in 1758. After this he traveled with his father through England, Scotland, Flanders, and Holland. In 1762 Oxford gave him the master of arts degree. Through the influence of Lord Bute he was appointed in August, 1762 Governor of New Jersey; Franklin was then in his thirtieth year. In 1753 Franklin was in Philadelphia. He took up his permanent residence at Burlington where he remained until October, 1774, coming to Perth Amboy in that year.

In 1775 Franklin suspended Lord Stirling from the Council. Stirling had in the mean time intercepted a letter of Franklin which was used in the charges against him. During part of the year 1776 Franklin was under parole; however, in June of that year he issued a proclamation convening the Assembly. Continental Congress ruled that the proclamation was not to be obeyed. For this he was arrested on the seventeenth of June by Colonel Heard. He refused to sign a parole and was taken to Burlington. Later he was turned over to Governor Trumbull of Connecticut and transferred to the house of Captain Ebenezer Grant of East Meridan.

Mrs. Franklin died on June 28, 1778 so that Franklin never saw her after his arrest in 1776. Franklin was finally exchanged on the first of November 1778 for Brigadier General Thompson: he had been imprisoned two years and four months. He returned to New York where he remained for nearly four years. At one time during his residence in New York he was president of the Associated Board of Royalists. In August. 1782. he sailed for England. The government granted him eighteen pounds for the losses he had suffered and eight hundred pounds per annum as a pension. He married again, a lady of Ireland. and lived to the age of eighty-two, dying on November 17, 1813. He had one child, William Temple Franklin, who was the biographer of his grandfather Benjamin and very inaccurate biographer as later searches have shown.

> Mules Content Supervising Historian

Approved:

SEVMOUR WILLIAMS A.T.A.

District Officer

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ADDENDUM

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There seems to be a great deal difference of opinion as to the date of erection of the Governor's House. The bronze tablet on the front of the house reads:

This is Governor's House
Built by the Colonial Proprietors of East
Jersey in 1762, with bricks which were
brought from England. Occupied first by
Frederick Smyth, Chief Justice of the
Colony. Then in 1774, by William Franklin
who was appointed Governor by the Crown.
In 1809 it became a hotel called the Brighton House at which time the South wing was
added. During the Civil War it was
patronized by Army and Naval Officers of
prominence.

Presented by the

Porth Amboy History Club May 1930

Reverond W. Northy Jones, rector of St. Peter's Church, Perth Amboy, says in the text of his book that the house was built in 1760. However, in a note under John Rattoone on page 447 he makes the date 1764. Governor Franklin did not arrive in Perth Amboy until the winter of 1763. We are told that he rented a house for himself at the time. It is also known that proprietors built the house for him. Because of this, we have accepted the date 1764 and the story told by Whitehead as the most likely. Whitehead relates that the Board of Proprietors in March 1762 adopted a plan and gave the necessary directions for building a proprietary house. It was completed according to him in 1764-65. It was not occupied, however, until May 1766, and from that date until May 1761 Chief Justice Smyth was the tenant at an annual rent of twenty-five pounds. Governor

Franklin moved into the residence in October 1774. Sometime after the Revolution the interior was destroyed. According to Reverend Jones, this was in 1784, and in the following year John Rattoone bought the house and repaired it.

Bibliography:

Jones, W. Northy History of St. Peter's Church, Perth Amboy, New Jersey Perth Amboy, By the Author, 1924

Whitehead, William A. Contributions to the Early History of Perth Amboy and Adjoining Country with Sketches of Men and Events in New Jersey During the Provincial Era New York, Appleton and Company, 1856

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